



Emily and Richardson Preyer Buckridge Reserve

Local Advisory Committee Meeting Minutes

Thursday, 30 October 2014, 10:30-11:45am

Attendance

LAC Members	Affiliation/Interest	Present
Mr. James Schreckengost	NCWRC – Enforcement	Yes
Mr. David Turner	NCWRC –Biologist	Yes
Mr. William Ridgeway	NCWRC – Game lands	Yes
Mr. Howard Phillips	PLNWR	Yes
Sheriff Darryl Liverman	Tyrrell County Sheriff's Office	Yes
Mr. Mike Clements	Community Member	No
Ms. Nina Griswell	Tyrrell County Government	No
Mr. Andy Hux	NCDFR	No
<u>Others Present</u>		
Woody Webster	DCM, Buckridge Site Manager	

Reserve Program Update – Woody Webster

Administrative Update

- Welcome to Brandon Puckett, new Research Coordinator. Brandon began work August 25 in our Beaufort office. Brandon has a BS in Environmental Science from NCSU, a Master's in Fisheries Science from University of Maryland, and a PhD in Marine Science from NCSU. He brings with him extensive knowledge and basic and applied research and monitoring experience

in NC estuarine systems. His recent work includes a blend of field ecology, oceanography, and population modeling to assess the function of marine reserves and design of reserve networks, as well as developing decision-support tools for ecological restoration. Additionally, Brandon's demonstrated ability to work with stakeholders and transfer results to management and conservation topics make him an excellent addition to our team. Marie Davis was also hired in May 2013 as the Reserve's temporary Environmental Educator located in the Wilmington office. Marie is conducting a variety of general public programming in the region, including on-site field trips, public presentations, and a paddling trip.

- Most Reserve offices are working on an update of the NCNERR management plan. LAC members were informed of this quinquennial process and the opportunity to comment on the update.

Site Updates – Woody Webster

Hunting

Bear harvest decreased last year to 12. Of those, 9 were male. This is 10 fewer than the record high of the 2012 season, but remains above early harvest records. Harvest monitoring continues to show a healthy population. Surrounding bear sanctuaries, especially adjacent National Wildlife Refuges, contribute to this.

Last year's deer harvest remained steady at 30. Of those harvested, 10 were female, and one was a button buck. There was some discussion about the possibility of underreported numbers for deer compared to the bear harvest.

This year NCWRC has added rock and Reserve-purchased geogrid material to the damaged front portion of Eastern Road. Elsewhere, fill material was used to level a number of problem holes. Road mowing took place in early October. While some road work was delayed by inclement weather, NCWRC reports that they are now fully staffed and plan to do additional road work during January-February 2015. Roads at Buckridge are normally closed to traffic at that time, presenting an early work opportunity compared to other game lands.

Invasive species

Due to contract issues last year and an early freeze, planned alligatorweed control was shifted to spring 2014. The NC Division of Water Resources treated locations along the Northwest Fork of Alligator River and around Gum Neck Landing. Reserve staff continued treatment of isolated outbreaks at Grapevine Landing and its canal.

Comparison of two treatment methods for the invasive shrub privet has shown that foliar treatment alone is just as effective as the cut and spray method. This is fortunate, since this method of control is much less labor intensive. Monitoring of treated areas of privet is ongoing, and treatment of additional interior outbreaks will be scheduled during the upcoming year.

Restoration

Vandalism of water control structures was documented over the past year, most of it occurring during the hunting season. Staff began to correct the vandalism, which involved removing the various efforts of vandals to jam water control structures into an “open” position. Staff is devising methods to make the water control structures more secure. LAC members were asked to direct anyone with questions or complaints about the water control structures to the site manager so he may begin to address their concerns.

Additionally, some water control structures have malfunctioned. Site G in particular has become undermined and flow is occurring along or around the culvert. Staff hopes to investigate the cause and determine whether the problem is due to poor design and installation or the action of burrowing animals.

Current Research

ECU continues to monitor the salt intrusion interface, especially its interaction with groundwater. They have expressed interest in additional research in the area, but relayed concerns about the current difficulty of access. Staff endeavors to keep ECU researchers informed of water control structure vandalism so they may account for any data discrepancies it may cause.

The NC Natural Heritage Program recently completed its inventory of Tyrrell County natural areas. Portions of Buckridge are within three different inventoried areas. This new publication is an important resource, though it may not contain every species occurrence listed in the Buckridge database.

A meeting between The Nature Conservancy, the site manager and ECU researchers this year worked to address how the groups could best collaborate on regional research and restoration projects. The most agreement was found in acknowledging current limitations of access and visibility, despite a desire to work locally. Efforts toward a regional restoration project will likely be taken back up spring 2015.

Outreach

The site manager helped PLNWR operate its visitor center for much of the summer, enabling education efforts for the Reserves to reach a broader audience. Staff also took part in the PLNWR Friends group Fun Day in May, reaching 200+ individuals. LAC members were reminded of staff availability for outreach events.

Upcoming activities

Bear season begins November 10 at Buckridge. The second bear season for Buckridge will be Monday through Wednesday Christmas week.

The Buckridge office has moved into the Pocosin Lakes National Wildlife Refuge main office, though a lease agreement is still in the works.

Depending on the pace of the NCNERR management plan update, a similar effort addressing state sites collectively may begin soon. Buckridge lacks a formal management plan and most state site plans have not been updated for years, so following the NERR model makes sense moving forward.

Member Roundtable

Sheriff Liverman and Mr. Schreckengost expressed their support in stopping vandalism of water control structures. Both felt that installing a camera to monitor activity would be a good next step. Mr. Schreckengost suggested the Plot Watcher Pro with a bear box as a tool he's found useful in executing his duties.

Mr. Ridgeway stated that NCWRC has a camera the Reserve could borrow to help inspect malfunctioning water control structures.

During a discussion about road work and upgrades, Mr. Turner offered that NCWRC engineers estimate an all-weather road constructed on a game land costs between \$150,000 and \$200,000 per mile. Mr. Phillips concurred that significant road improvements can be very costly.

Mr. Turner also stated that side-mowing, much-needed at Buckridge for road maintenance, is costly. He suggested DCM consider allowing the use of herbicides along the roads to suppress encroaching vegetation. Aquatic-safe Garlon and Element 3A would be the most likely choices. Chemical suppression would allow a longer return time on side mowing, which currently cannot keep pace with woody vegetation encroachment of roads.

Mr. Ridgeway stated that while they have an office for staff in Columbia, they continue to look for an area to use as a depot, where equipment can be securely stored close to the area's game lands. He asked LAC members to inform him of any potential locations.

A problem with bear baiting in portions of Buckridge near Over the Swamp road was brought up. There is also some discrepancy about where the boundaries are in this area. Mr. Ridgeway offered to help the site manager post some of these areas to assist enforcement efforts.

A discussion occurred about whether certain roads should be abandoned by the Reserve, from a maintenance perspective, and whether there was potential for improving others. Interest was voiced in extending the accessibility of Eastern road beyond the damaged bridge over State Canal. Mr. Phillips noted that a bridge replacement might be more expensive than a culvert in the long run, given that many bridges have inspection regulations to consider.

Public Comments

No members of the public were present.

Review of Action Items

Action items for next year include the search for funding for landscape scale restoration and scheduling next fall's LAC meeting.